



News Release

PRESS OFFICE

Release Date: March 24, 2008

Release No: 08-324

Contact: Carol Chastang (202) 205-6987

Internet Address: www.sba.gov/news/

SBA Honors Florida Volunteer Melinda Bygate For Outstanding Disaster Recovery Effort

WASHINGTON – After hearing about the destruction caused by the Lake County, Florida, tornadoes on February 2, 2007, Melinda Bygate gathered food, clothing, blankets and supplies from her home, canvassed her neighbors and drove her car filled with goods to the devastated town of Lady Lake, 12 miles away from her home in Summerfield.

The church collecting relief items told her no more volunteers were needed. She stayed anyway, and jumped in to help out after learning that another agency needed help with gathering donated goods. Bygate became a one-woman recovery agency—delivering goods, connecting survivors with services, visiting people in nursing homes and hospitals, providing transportation, and even negotiating with contractors and soliciting donations to help defray rebuilding costs for some mobile home owners.

For her quick thinking, ingenuity and determination to support Lake County disaster survivors, Bygate will receive the ***2008 Phoenix Award for Outstanding Contributions To Disaster Recovery by a Volunteer.***

The award will be presented during the U.S. Small Business Administration's (SBA) *National Small Business Week 2008*, to be held in Washington, D.C and New York City April 21-25.

“The Phoenix Award is an acknowledgment of an individual’s heroic effort and recognition of contributions to the physical and economic recovery of their communities,” said SBA Administrator Steve Preston. “Melinda Bygate displayed tremendous courage and resourcefulness in the aftermath of the disaster, and she exemplifies the spirit one must have to rebuild after a tragedy like this.”

This marks the 10th year the SBA has given Phoenix Awards to business owners, public officials and volunteers who displayed courage, ingenuity and tenacity in the aftermath of a disaster, while contributing to the rebuilding of their communities.

The SBA makes low-interest, taxpayer-backed disaster loans to homeowners, renters, and businesses of all sizes. Following the 2005 Gulf Coast hurricanes, the SBA has approved more than \$10.9 billion in disaster loans to more than 160,000 hurricane survivors, the largest response in the agency 55-year history. To find out more about the SBA’s disaster assistance program, visit the Web site at <http://www.sba.gov/services/disasterassistance/>.

For more information about National Small Business Week, visit www.sba.gov/sbw.

Small Business Week 2008 cosponsors include: Sam's Club, Administaff, Raytheon, IBM, Chevron, Cisco, Lockheed Martin, Lowe's, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, Minority Business Development Agency, MyBizHomepage, Dun & Bradstreet, Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, Consumer Energy, Alliance, National Federation of Independent Business, and SCORE

The U.S. Small Business Administration's participation in this cosponsored activity does not constitute an express or implied endorsement of any cosponsor's, donor's, grantee's, contractor's or participant's opinions, products, or services. All SBA programs and cosponsored programs are extended to the public on a nondiscriminatory basis. Reasonable arrangements for persons with disabilities will be made, if requested at least 2 weeks in advance, by contacting sbw@sba.gov. Cosponsorship Authorization #SBW2008